

# A Study of Greek Words

by Charles Anderson

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*This sermon explores the significance of Greek words in the Bible and their implications for understanding Jesus Christ as the Alpha and Omega.*

**Duration:** 32:11

**Scripture:** Matthew 27:46, Revelation 1:7-8, Revelation 1:10

**Topics:** "Greek Words"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the marvel of how God created each person uniquely, with different physical features. He emphasizes that although we may think we look similar, we are actually different and have different needs for Christ. The speaker then shares a personal story about a student who was failing in school but had potential. Through a conversation with the student, the speaker realizes that the student had served in the military and had a disciplined mindset. The speaker relates this to how Jesus is the answer to our needs, using the metaphor of Jesus being the bread of life, the light of the world, the door, the true vine, the good shepherd, the way, the truth, and the life. The sermon concludes with the speaker highlighting the preciousness of Jesus' name, particularly in times of loss and grief.

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## Transcript

As I listen to that sad recital on the part of our brother Woodhouse describing his degenerative processes that have set in already and brought him almost to the point of debilitation, I could just think of an incident that occurred down in Boca Raton. We have down there what they call a donut club. It's not a club, and they don't eat donuts.

So where they got the name, I don't know. But every Monday morning, in the wintertime at least, some 75 or more men meet, and they happen to meet in the Boca Bible Chapel now. And over the years, they've had some of the very finest speakers come and give their testimonies or minister the word.

One day, I was there, and a dear old fellow came in, and he kind of collapsed in his chair. And I said, well, how are you feeling? He really didn't look that hot. But he said, I want to tell you something, brother.

He said, this getting old ain't for kids. I'm sure there's a lot of amens inside of that. And then not long ago, we were in a hotel somewhere up in New England, and I saw a bumper sticker.

Some of them are horrid, you know. But I thought, man, I should buy this. Now I wish I'd bought a half a dozen.

If I did, I would have given one to Ernie here. It says, it's better to be over the hill than under it. I'm sure you may have noticed this yourself, but there's a rather strange feature about the King James Version of the Bible.

I need not do more than remind you that what we hold in our hands, in our mother tongue, is a version of the Bible. It is a translation of both Old and New Testament scriptures from other languages. Old Testament almost exclusively from the Hebrew language, with a few exceptions here and there.

The New Testament, obviously, is a translation into English out of Greek. And this is the reason why every now and again you hear a preacher say, now it says in the Greek. All he's doing is trying to get back to the original language in which the revelation of God was given to men in order to get a little clearer sense of what the text may be saying.

Well, with that in mind, it's a rather strange phenomenon that scattered throughout the Bible, there are some expressions that have not been translated. And you will recognize them. You may have the answers to what they mean right off.

Take, for instance, the word Selah, which occurs in the book of Psalms and only one other place in the Old Testament, oddly enough, in the book of Habakkuk. The word Selah. I've heard all kinds of explanations as to what that word means.

They say it's a musical term. And it's most interesting when you get an audience to read aloud the scriptures, what happens when they hit that word in the Psalms. There are some who are dead certain that it should be read and with emphasis.

If it's there in the Bible, they say, I'm going to read it. I even read the commas and the dots and everything else. All inspired.

So they say Selah. But then there are some who say, no, I'm not so sure about that. And they have another idea.

They say you wouldn't expect a singer to stand up. That's a rest sign in music. You wouldn't expect a singer singing a solo to stand up and sing a phrase like, heaven came down, rest, and glory filled my soul.

Rest. You'd say, what kind of a soloist is this? They're actually singing the symbols of the page. You wouldn't expect that, I suppose.

So these people say, you're not supposed to say those words there. That's meant for the choir. So they don't read it at all.

And then there are some folks in between the two, and they start by saying sit, and then they stop. So it's fun to watch an audience when they read the scriptures aloud. But there's that word.

Then, you know, you've run across the expression Urim and Thummim. You read that in the Bible? Now, that certainly wasn't, those words are not English words. They're Hebrew expressions.

What do they mean? Oh, never mind. You may be an erudite scholar of the scriptures, and you can have the answer to that right off. But there it is.

It stands up right in the word of God. And we wonder, should we, what does it mean? Why is it there thus? Or when you come into the New Testament, you hear the words of Jesus, and why did they put them in that way? Talitha Kumi, when he spoke those words in the death chamber of the little girl. Now, I know that the writer also says that is being interpreted, and then explains it.

Or you'll come to an expression like Abba, Father. We sing that a great deal in our hymns. What does it mean, Abba? Whatever it means.

Why does it stand there that way? Why didn't they, they were wrestling with all the rest of the text, trying to tell us what it means. Why did they make exceptions here? Or you can go on the jot and tittle, Anathema Maranatha. Great statement, that.

And then, of course, the Lord's words, Eli, Eli, Lama, Sabachthani, with which we're so familiar. Nahushtan. Now, I've puzzled over all of these expressions, time after time, and I've said, what was it that led these translators, who were trying to get the whole of the revelation into another medium, another language, why were they constrained to leave these expressions, shall I say, in the raw, the way they found them in the scriptures? Now, there may be some better answers than I'll give you, but it seems to me that the main purpose behind this phenomenon is that maybe God intended that we should, by very curiosity about these expressions, give them a little extra thought.

Maybe that's why. Maybe we shouldn't hurry past these expressions so rapidly, lest we miss an extra special blessing. And so, maybe the Holy Spirit led the writers to leave them as they found them, in order that those of us who follow will stop a second or two longer and say, Lord, what does this mean? And ponder it.

If you've got a better answer than that, please tell me afterwards. And if yours is not as good as mine, I still will hang on to mine. But at any rate, that's how I feel about these expressions.

Now, especially do I feel that way when I come to the last book of the Bible, and I hear our Lord speaking. Will you turn with me to the book of Revelation, chapter 1? Revelation, chapter 1. And John, in the seventh verse of the first chapter, calls to mind that he is coming with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, amen.

And then our Lord speaks. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is and was and which is to come, the Almighty. And then verse 10.

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, and what thou seest write in a book, send it unto the seven churches which are here named. And I turned to see the voice that spake with me, and being turned, and then he follows that magnificent description of our glorious Lord. Well, there it stands.

I am Alpha and Omega. This seems to be fairly understandable and very simple to comprehend because we understand that these two letters, these expressions, are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Now, knowing that, and knowing that the translators were working from Greek into English, I wonder why they didn't say, I am A and V. Well, they couldn't really say A and Z and be absolutely correct because that last letter is not a Z, or as you friends from over the border say, and some of you from over

the water, Zed, you know.

That is an O. A and O. Well, however, it has the force of the first and last letters, say, of our alphabet. Why didn't they just leave it that way? Why did they keep these Greek expressions of those first two letters? I go back to my original reason and say I believe it's because God wants us to stand before this burning bush and catch a fresh and new glimpse of the glory of the one who bears this wonderful name. I am Alpha and Omega.

I am, Jesus says, the alphabet. I am the first and the last. You know, the expression I am always prefaces some wonderful revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

How my soul thrills when I read in the word of God him saying I am the bread of life because I came to him once desperately hungry and I found perfect satisfaction in him and I found his word is true. Having eaten of him, I've never hungered again. I am the bread of life.

Or when he says I am the light of the world. I recall the darkness that once enveloped my whole life and then when I came to him I learned and saw for the first time the light and I've never walked in darkness since. He shed the light of life upon every step of the pathway and down it goes.

I am the door. I am the true vine. I am the good shepherd.

I'm the way and I'm the truth and I'm the light. But you know, my friend, never is our Lord Jesus and this name I am this alphabet that he talks about here I am. Never is it more precious than when we stand by a gash in the breast of the earth and lay away for the last time on this earth our precious loved ones.

We've encased them in a box and thrust them out of our sight and then we have to drop the earth upon them and as we walk away from that gash in the earth we hear him say I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me though he were dead yet shall he live and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. I tell you, never does my Lord sound more precious, more wonderful than when he stands by the edge of the grave and he says I am.

I'm the resurrection and the life. So we come to this last book of the Bible and we have Jesus saying I am the alphabet. Now that leads me to think a little bit about the alphabet itself.

Let me suggest to you the inexhaustibility of the alphabet and thus the inexhaustibility of Jesus. One of the big libraries of the world certainly not the largest is the New York Library. I took a group of students there one day and dropped them off.

For most of the day we had some very old manuscripts we wanted to look at. They examined them and then I found myself looking for the index area. I was just a bit curious.

You know that library as I recollected fills a whole square, a whole block. I've forgotten how many stories there are in that library but one whole floor of the New York Public Library is given over to nothing but index cards to tell you what else is in the library. So if you want to find what else is there you go up to that particular floor and there it all is indexed.

And it's awesome to think of all those volumes, those tiers, those tons of tiers those hundreds of thousands of volumes those tons of poems. But listen to me for a minute. Do you know that all of those books in that library at least in our mother tongue are nothing but the incalculable numbers or

arrangements of 26 letters of our alphabet.

That's all they are. Now Shakespeare wrote Romeo and Juliet and Hamlet Macbeth. Dickens wrote David Copperfield Oliver Twist and the Pickwick Papers and so on.

But as a matter of fact Shakespeare and Dickens and all the others really wrote nothing but the 26 letters of our English alphabet in amazing numbers of combinations. Now they did a good job of it. You try to do the same thing and I and theirs immediately detected that these were masters at the manipulation of those letters.

We are clumsy oafs at trying to make them mean the same thing. Every poet, every historian every novelist who's ever written anything has simply juggled these same 26 letters of the alphabet. Because they were masters they didn't have 30 to work with.

Nor did they have less than 26. They had the same combination of letters with which they labored. And have all of these exhausted the alphabet? If some writer today should decide to write a book we had fellowship with our youngest son yesterday down in Orlando and he was just telling us by the way that his third book is due off the press the next two months and his fourth book is ready to be published at the end of the summer.

So I said to him, give it up Leif no chance that you can write anything at all. Because it's all been the alphabet's all been used up. There's nothing left that you can find useful in our alphabet.

Thousands upon thousands of authors have written ahead of you they've drained the alphabet dry. Dummy, don't you try it for a second. Did I tell him that? No indeed.

Because I couldn't. I know that when he comes to that same combination of letters to the alphabet he will find it inexhaustible. He will discover that it is as fresh as if no one had ever used it before.

And that's true of our Lord Jesus Christ. Are you a sinner longing for forgiveness of sin with a conscience that drives you to the point almost of despair? And are you saying to yourself but there's so many that have come and drawn from the fountainhead of Calvary's cross there's no mercy left for me. There's no forgiveness there can't be much.

Millions have drawn but listen I have good news for you. Come to the fountain of divine forgiveness. Come to the cross and you will discover that the one who says I am Alpha and Omega is as fresh in his forgiving strength and power and resource as if not a single sinner had ever come to him before.

He, like the alphabet, is inexhaustible. There's another thought that I want you to take with you and that is the indispensability of Jesus. Like the alphabet the alphabet itself is indispensable to our understanding of literature.

One of the things that's hard to comprehend is to believe that in our country there are millions of people who can't read. Obviously, therefore, they can't write either. They can't read or write.

We call them illiterates. I wonder, no, I don't suppose any of us can imagine, even imagine remotely what it would be like not to be able to read or write. We've known how to do it since days way back in the dimness of our memory.

We had a boy once in our school who was sent up by the committee. They said, you know, when he got to when the students get to me that's the end. I mean, they go through all the process and then they finally come to the Supreme Court.

And so when he hit my desk it was all over. The committees had made their recommendations. He couldn't make it.

He was failing. And yet he was a sharp fellow. He had spent his time in the military.

He had graduated from high school, oddly enough. And so he came into my office and with his military training he stood as stiff as a ramrod. I had to say, at ease, soldier.

He had to sit down so he could relax. And then I said, look, I've got your record in front of me and they're saying you can't make it here. You've got to go.

And so I suppose I have to sign you out. You'll have to leave campus maybe today or tomorrow at the latest. But before you go I want to know why this is so.

As I look at your record you had a fine record in the army and you graduated from high school. And suddenly this kid wilted and almost burst into tears. And he said, sir, I wish my mother was here.

For one moment I thought, what have I got now? He wishes his mother was here. He's a grown fellow. He's 26 years old.

And then he proceeded to tell me this. He said, you know, I can't read and therefore I have much trouble writing. I guess I can't write either but I can't read.

I said, how'd you get through high school? He said, my mother wrote all my papers. My mother did all my homework. I depended on her.

Really, she's the one who should have the diploma. I couldn't make it without her. And obviously she's not here in this institution so I'm not making it.

And the trouble with that lad was that he didn't have the key that would unlock all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. It was sad. Argue with me if you want, you psychologists and educationists and sociologists.

The fact still remains that this boy couldn't make it because he didn't know how to read. What the alphabet is to literature, Jesus is to life. Without him, life is a hopeless enigma.

All the treasures that we'd like to unlock from knowledge can only be done when you have the key in your hand. And the answers to life's problems is to be found only in the Lord Jesus who is Alpha and Omega. I wish there were time for me to show you the numbers of times this name occurs in the last book of the Bible.

Most significant. Only two other times besides the first chapter. And at each occurrence it's a very significant moment.

For instance, when you come to the end of the book you'll find that as we face eternity and there are mysteries that we can't comprehend, it's at that juncture the Lord Jesus once again is dubbed with the title

I am Alpha and Omega. He is indispensable. My friend, you'll never find the answer to all of life's problems, any of them, until you have Jesus Christ, God's answer.

You see. Well, just one more thought for us to take with us today. May I speak to you about the adaptability of the Lord Jesus Christ? The most adaptable instrument we know is the alphabet.

You know, if a lover wants to express his love and passion toward his beloved, what's he going to use? The alphabet. If a poet wants to enshrine his message in a poem, what does he use? The alphabet. If you're a businessman and you're a toughie and somebody owes you money, you may cut your letter down to something like this.

Bill. Anybody owes me money, I never say dear Bill. There's no dearness about it.

You owe me dough. Bill. You bum.

You owe me so much money. Pay up or else. My name.

Even if I'm as blunt as that, I still use the alphabet. I can't escape it. I use the same letters.

It's adaptable, whether you're writing, as I said, poetry or a love letter or a business letter or whatever. Oh, it's such an adaptable instrument. Now, you know, no two of us are alike, exactly alike.

Isn't that wonderful? How marvelous. We all only have one nose and two eyes and two ears and a mouth and little stuff sprinkled up on top and all stuck together and kind of a roundish lump. But isn't it marvelous that God put those things all together so that we really don't look like each other? We once in a while think we do, but we don't.

We're different. And I need Christ in a different way than you need him. We need him alike, but in different ways.

When I was a boy in school, a little more than a boy, I hated book reviews. Oh, how I did hate a book review. Well, our teacher assigned us once to one.

It was a fascinating story, and that's why I read it through and I was willing to write on it. It was called The Cruise of the Cashalot, and it was about a man named Frank Bullen, I think, and he went up to New England to sign on a whaling ship, and when he got to the dock and he saw the cashalot, that was the name of the boat he was going to take, he writes in his book, me thinks I never saw a filthier old scow. Yeah.

So anyhow, he signed aboard, and they went out into the North Atlantic in search of whales, and he had to learn a few lessons. When a whale was sighted or a school of whales was sighted, the alarm was sounded, and then a boat was sent out, smaller boat, men rowed out, and here's a fellow in the front with a harpoon, and they would sight these great denizens of the deep, and finally when they got within striking distance and safe distance, they would release the harpoon, and the whine of that cable, that rope or cable, as the whale would seek to get rid of this thing that hurt it. And so Frank Bullen got into a boat, a small boat, and they said, now don't get too close to this thing, because if we get hit with its tail when it thrashes about, he can smash this little boat like a tinderbox.

Well, they got out there, and the boat got too close to this whale who was harpooned, and it went around and around and around in ever smaller circles until at last it got close enough to the small boat that it

thrashed about, and its tail indeed struck the boat, smashed it to bits, and tossed the men into the water. And Frank Bullen said he went down, down, down, he thought he was going right straight down to Davy Jones' locker. And then when he came back up, gasping for air, to his utter horror, he discovered that he was on the back of a wounded whale.

Well, that's better than Jonah being down its stomach, but he was on its back. And as he lay there, the thing is broad enough and it's slippery, he was sliding around a bit, he had nothing to grab hold of, but he lay on the back of that wounded animal, he began to contemplate how he might die. Maybe it would swallow him, maybe it would toss him out into the ocean and he would drown.

Maybe, maybe, maybe. Terrible thoughts. And then he looked around to see if there was anybody to help.

And he describes how suddenly he saw coming up over the horizon the spars of the cachalot. And the boat, the mother boat, got closer and closer. And finally, Frank Bullen writes this, he thinks, I never saw a more beautiful boat in all my life.

You know what made the difference? An awareness of his need. And that's true of the soul outside of Christ. You'll find that the Lord Jesus Christ is adaptable to your need, my friend, this morning.

Should you be sitting in this audience without the sweet peace that comes from forgiven sins, Jesus Christ can meet your need. You may see no beauty in him at first, but when God opens your eyes, you'll see him as the most desirable and the most beautiful one in all heaven and earth. Let us pray.

How we love to hear thee say, Lord Jesus, I am Alpha and Omega. I'm the beginning and the end. I'm sufficient for everything in between.

I'm sufficient for your need. And if you have me, you have all you need. We love thee this morning because thou hast become to us our Redeemer and our Savior.

And we worship thee as God's Alpha and Omega. Amen.

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